

Partnering

No aspect of the green building planning, design and construction process is more important than partnering. No other factor will make your project more successful in sharing and promoting your “vision,” cultivating allies, opening dialogue and gaining support and momentum.

As a first step, an organization must internally structure its core values and mission to develop a working document that can be shared with the design architect. Organizational employees should be empowered to assist management. They can shape and mold the core values of the project so ownership can be established immediately by everyone within the organization. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources used an existing Pollution Prevention (P2) Workgroup to mold and shape the department’s mission into a set of core project values. These values were used throughout the project to create a vision for those subsequently participating in the design process.

Public organizations need the support of administrative agencies within the government hierarchy such as design, construction and facility management agencies. Buy-in from these entities requires a strong commitment to the core project values. The creation of mission statements should be initiated to stimulate their creativity and inspire innovative thinking. The use of public funding also requires that project mission statements elicit the confidence of the executive and legislative branches by securing their philosophic support. It is also critical to demonstrate that the project makes economical sense and promotes good fiscal policy.

Partnering among government bodies – hosted by the design architect – can enhance relationships and bring the team together to solicit constructive input, relieve tensions and fears, nullify perceived problems and solidify working processes. The team develops its own set of values and guiding principles which are documented and signed. The one overriding purpose, served by the first partnering sessions, is to give participants a feeling of being a part of a team. Their goal is to embark upon an odyssey where challenges are overcome through agreement on the end result – a quality sustainable building designed with the highest standards and held to a specific budget. The actual structure of the partnering agreement should be referenced throughout the project to encourage continuity.

Strong allies then must be developed within the organization, throughout government entities and with the public in general. The process requires that the organization’s core values and the project mission statements be strengthened. This vision must encompass abundant ideas from a diverse group. Purposefully engaging specific strategic partners strengthens the vision, creates excitement and generates momentum in its support.

A design charrette was used to collaboratively engage strategic partners in a process to better define a list of concepts the architect would use to visualize the building on paper. While the structure of a charrette varies, depending on the design project and group make-up, charrettes often take place in multiple sessions in which the group divides into sub-groups. Each sub-group then presents its work to the full group. At this point, the project can be visualized by the design architect and the conceptual design begins to take form.

The strategic partners of the project included department employees, legislators, local community leaders, city planners and public works directors, academia, the building trades, material manufacturers, suppliers, those responsible for design and construction and building management within state government and other constituents. It becomes extremely important for the design architect to establish a setting that develops a rapport with participants that solicits creative and innovative paradigms that shift conventional thinking. This paradigm shift then becomes the guiding principles the project will use during the design, construction and LEED certification processes.

A third partnering session was held once the construction contractor was chosen. Again, the design architect organized the session with participants from the state design and construction and facilities management agencies and the Department of Natural Resources. Bids had already been submitted by subcontractors and suppliers so the topic of discussions was more about the concepts of sustainable design, the vision of the department and issues relating to resolving problems and conflicts. It was surprising how much interest subcontractors and suppliers had in being involved in the construction of a green building. There was almost total agreement that construction of a green building was not much different than any other construction project. It was the differences in some of the materials and how system pieces were integrated with one another into the total scheme of the project that really piqued their interest. Sessions were held between different trades to learn more about how their particular pieces were integrated with other systems. Participants became even more enthusiastic about the project when they were allowed to meet with other trade groups to discuss how important one group was to another in the success of the project. Organizers of the session were gratified that the group became a true team when participants thought the project was so special that they asked if the state could have special DNR Green Building stickers designed and manufactured so they could be applied to their hard hats (photo at right). Once the building received its official name, the logo was updated, as seen at the bottom.



The project was validated by participants in so many agencies and at so many levels throughout state government. The design architect developed plans and specs that fully met the visual and conceptual design created by so many participants. The construction contractor and its subcontractors constructed a beautiful building and their attitude was key to the success of the building. Everyone left their egos at the door. The building is a credit to the time and effort spent developing the vision and the team ethic through partnering. A LEED platinum-rated building is the testament to all those and what they brought to the project. It was an incredibly positive experience for all those who participated. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources thanks you all – it has been an incredible success.

If we can leave you with one concept regarding partnerships, it would be:

*Partnering is about adapting individual behavior to be a part of a larger effort;
it's about becoming a positive participant in a partnership;
but not in name only.*



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